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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE, NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/WATERS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAL](#) [KWBG](#) [PHUM](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: EREKAT OUTLINES NEXT STEPS TO CODEL SHAYS

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary. During an August 19 meeting in Jericho, PLO Chief Negotiator Sa'eb Erekat told Codel Shays that the conflict in Lebanon resulted in a defeat for political moderation. Erekat maintained that extremist forces such as Hamas and Hezbollah have gained as a result of the violence, but he emphasized that most Palestinians remain committed to peace with Israel. Erekat argued that Hamas has shown itself incapable of governing, but Fatah has failed to institute necessary internal reforms to challenge Hamas successfully in future elections. Erekat criticized Israel's detention of Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) and Hamas ministers, charging that the arrests have deflected public criticism away from Hamas. Erekat indicated that President Abbas' (Abu Mazen) talks with the Hamas leadership in Gaza are designed to reach consensus on a new government based on the Quartet conditions, end violence including the launching of Qassam rockets into Israel, and secure the release of the kidnapped IDF soldier in Gaza. Erekat suggested a meeting between Abu Mazen and Israeli PM Olmert might be possible within the coming weeks. End summary.

12. (C) U.S House Representatives Christopher Shays, Bob Inglis, Brian Higgins, and Al Green met August 19 with PLO Chief Negotiator Sa'eb Erekat in Jericho. Professional staff members Nicholas Palarino, Robert Kelley, and Jeffrey Baran, DOD military aide Major Carolyn Walford, and ConGen DPO and Poloff (notetaker) also participated in the meeting.

Erekat: Moderate Voices on the
Defensive After Lebanon Fiasco

13. (C) Erekat told Codel Shays that the fallout from the Israeli-Hezbollah war in Lebanon has resulted in the defeat of moderates. Pro-peace advocates are facing significant challenges in the aftermath of the hostilities, Erekat said. Erekat expressed concern that a more radicalized Islamic element may emerge from the conflict, similar to the emergence of Hezbollah following the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 and the creation of Hamas in 1987 at the start of the first Intifadah. Erekat advised against assuming that Hezbollah could be removed from southern Lebanon, as the organization is deeply rooted in the social, economic, and political fabric of the country.

14. (C) Erekat said that for both Palestinians and Israelis, a peace agreement requires a two-state solution, as previously outlined by President Bush and based on the Clinton parameters. The only alternative is a "one-state" solution, and any discussion of a bi-national state would provoke accusations that Palestinians seek to undermine Israel's Jewish majority. He said that absent any serious

negotiations, Palestinians bear the brunt of ongoing IDF operations in the West Bank and Gaza. Nonetheless, Erekat indicated that some 70 percent of Palestinians support a peace agreement with Israel.

Hamas Government Failing, But Fatah Still Disorganized

15. (C) While the Hamas-led PA has failed to prove that it can govern, Erekat noted that Fatah remains woefully unable to pose an effective electoral challenge to Hamas. Hamas has succeeded in portraying Fatah as corrupt, Erekat said, while also claiming that Israeli withdrawals in Gaza and the northern West Bank last year were a result of "resistance" organizations like Hamas rather than the product of negotiations.

16. (C) Erekat criticized Israel's detention of Hamas cabinet ministers and PLC members, noting that none of those arrested were involved in the kidnapping of the IDF soldier Gilad Shalit. Such tactics only increased popular support for Hamas, Erekat said. The arrests were particularly unfortunate as they have come in the midst of growing public demonstrations against the Hamas-led ministries for their failure to provide salaries. Erekat noted that the Palestinian teacher unions are planning to hold a large strike against the Ministry of Education on August 25, but the August 19 Israeli arrest of Education Minister and Deputy PM Nasser Eddin al-Sha'er would propel al-Sha'er to the status of "hero," thereby diminishing the criticism directed against Hamas.

Abu Mazen's Talks With Hamas Set Conditions For New Government

17. (C) Erekat said that Abu Mazen has put forth conditions necessary to form a national unity government in discussions with the Hamas leadership in Gaza. Abu Mazen has informed Hamas that a new government must endorse the Quartet conditions calling for recognition of Israel, ending violence, and accepting previous PLO and international agreements. Erekat said that Abu Mazen would report any progress in these discussions to the USG and others to ensure full international support. Erekat also said that Abu Mazen had also emphasized the release of Gilad Shalit in talks with Hamas.

18. (C) Erekat noted ongoing efforts to halt Qassam rocket fire from Gaza into Israel. Erekat said that he would consult with the Israelis once he has the agreement of all Palestinian factions. He noted that Abu Mazen's office is coordinating with the United States Security Coordinator (USSC) to upgrade the Presidential Guard (PG) to undertake this type of mission and that the PG has already proven its capabilities at the Rafah crossing.

Abu Mazen/Olmert Meeting?

19. (C) Erekat suggested a meeting might be possible between Abu Mazen and Israeli PM Olmert within the coming weeks. He hoped the meeting would address the release of Palestinian prisoners, which Abu Mazen and PM Olmert had briefly discussed last June in Jordan.

110. (U) Codel Shays did not have an opportunity to clear this cable prior to their departure.

WALLES